



# NEWS RELEASE

CALIFORNIA STATE TREASURER PHIL ANGELIDES

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CONTACT: Drew Mendelson  
916.653.4052

## **PURPLE HEART DAY MESSAGE FROM CALIFORNIA STATE TREASURER PHIL ANGELIDES**

On August 7, 1782 General George Washington created the Badge of Military Merit, signified by a purple heart for troops fighting in the American Revolution “to foster and encourage every species of Military Merit,” ordering that whenever any singularly meritorious action is performed, “the author of it shall be permitted to wear on his facings over the left breast, the figure of a heart in purple cloth or silk, edged with narrow lace or binding.”

In 1932, that medal of Military Merit became the Purple Heart, awarded to any member of the U.S. armed forces who is “wounded by an instrument of war in the hands of the enemy.” Though the U.S. has other medals to recognize the valor and bravery of those who serve in its military, no other medal so directly honors the men and women wounded in battle while placing themselves in harm’s way in defense of our nation.

Congress is considering legislation by New York Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton to make August 7 each year an official day of remembrance for Purple Heart recipients.

Thus I believe that Monday, August 7, 2006, some 224 years after General Washington first created the Purple Heart, is a fitting day to honor our service members, particularly the Californians who serve in all branches of the U.S. military, among them the nearly 14,000 men and women of the California Army and Air National Guard who have been called to the front lines in Iraq and Afghanistan since September 11, 2001.

In all, more than 260 Californians – including members of the regular U.S. military and the California National Guard – have died in this service and many others have been wounded. All, the wounded and those killed in this service, are recipients of the Purple Heart.

But while the nation has honored their bravery, California, which has asked so much of these men and women, is failing them in a shameful way. California has both a moral and practical responsibility to ensure that these citizen soldiers and their families are offered adequate support. Around the country, states typically offer a variety of benefits to honor and support their National Guard. Today, however, the members of the California National Guard and their families are offered less support than the National Guard in other states.

California, for instance, is the only state that does not provide any college education support to its National Guard members. Current law authorizes the state to assume some of the college loans of National Guard members, but the program has never been funded.

California National Guard members receive health insurance from the federal military health system for themselves and their families while they serve on active duty. However, nationally, one in five members of the National Guard – and 40 percent of the junior enlisted men and women - has no health insurance when they are not activated.

Child and elder care is often a delicate balance for families to maintain even under the best of circumstances. National Guard families frequently have to make difficult adjustments in caring for children or aging parents when National Guard members are called suddenly to active duty, leaving one spouse to cope with the duties formerly shared by two people. The extended absence of a family caregiver can strain the very fabric of family life.

The California Military Family Relief Fund was established to aid California National Guard families facing financial crisis and was funded in its first year by nearly \$300,000 from a voluntary state income tax check-off. Forty percent of National Guard households reported lower incomes when activated, some by over \$30,000 annually, and many families report lower income even after deactivation. Despite the pressing needs of many National Guard families, only a small portion of available funds has been distributed.

Members of the National Guard serve the state and the country out of a sense of duty, national pride, and community service. When called to active duty, our National Guard men and women leave behind loved ones, jobs, and all too often, a hole in the family budget. The wages National Guard members are paid while on active duty are often substantially less than what they make in their civilian careers. The State of California, and some large companies like Home Depot and Boeing, make up the difference between the civilian paycheck and the military paycheck when their employees are called to active duty. However, a majority of Guardsmen and women work for small businesses that cannot afford to absorb the full cost of continuing to pay an activated employee.

Today, the California National Guard stands ready to be deployed on a moment's notice to defend this nation and to respond to calamity in the state and in the nation including earthquakes, fires, and floods.

The heavy demands on the National Guard have caused members to leave at alarming rates, and recruiting has fallen short of targets. The California National Guard has dropped five thousand soldiers below its authorized strength, and some units do not have enough troops to be classified as ready for action.

We honor the bravery of our wounded and fallen heroes with the Purple Heart and with other medals for valor above and beyond the call of duty. But as Californians we have our own duty to ensure that our Guard members are not only honored, but also fairly compensated for their service. We must guarantee that, in return for their service, they and their families' health and economic well-being do not suffer, and that their service is repaid with opportunities for education and career advancement.

It is the least we can do for those Californians who have so often put their own lives on hold in order to serve and protect their fellow Californians.

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